



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
January 7, 2005

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LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Decision Notice For Proposed Tower Rock State Park

Proposed Action:

The proposed action would designate this 136-acre Lewis & Clark landmark as TOWER ROCK STATE PARK. Site improvements would be constructed to facilitate public access, interpretation of the natural and cultural resources at this significant Lewis & Clark Trail attraction.

Specific improvements include:

- Standard highway signs posted on the Interstate 15 right of way, informing motorists of access to Tower Rock State Park via the Hardy Creek Exit (#247).
- Standard roadside signs on the Old Highway #91 right of way (River Recreation Road), informing the public of the entrance to Tower Rock State Park.
- A 15,000 sq.ft. parking area, surfaced with gravel or millings to accommodate up to eight vehicles including buses. The distance between the parking area and the existing dumpster station would be at least 180 feet.
- A kiosk would be installed adjacent to the parking area to inform the public of the historic significance of the site.
- A primitive trail, about 300 feet long, would be designated by a mowed swath across the grasslands from the parking area to a vantage point at the base of Tower Rock.
- A 330-foot, four-wire fence with a pedestrian pass through would be installed between the parking area and grasslands.

The parking area, interpretive signs, fence and most of the trail would be located on a 3.29 acre easement granted to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks by the Montana Department of Transportation on July 8, 2004 (Cascade County Record R0086767). Construction work would be conducted between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on weekdays.

Decision:

Based on the analysis in the EA, I have decided to proceed with this proposal.

Five comments were received from the public. All were positive and all generally supported the proposed action. There were some suggestions for the final placement of the parking area. These suggestions were accepted and the design adjusted.

I have reviewed the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

This action is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Director in writing and postmarked within 30 days of the date of this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how appellant has previously commented to the Department or participated in the decision making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal.

Public Comments:

The following quotes are excerpted from the public comments received:

1. "I am glad to see your interest in the development of a parking area with interpretive signs at Tower Rock. It is an amazing story how the Rock was discovered and snatched from the hands of a public auction at the last minute. I live close to Tower Rock on Hardy Creek. In fact, the front window of my house looks directly onto the Rock. Your efforts will increase public awareness & enjoyment of a unique national treasure" Fred Miller, Cascade, MT

2. "As the State of Montana already owns the property surrounding Tower Rock and also owns the best access (the south bound entrance ramp on I-15 exit 247) the site you have chosen is the most logical." Alan Hobbs, Cascade, MT

3. "I am very happy with everything being on the East side of Tower Rock. And I would be very unhappy with the alternative plan (improvements on the West side). Carla J. Hobbs, Cascade, MT

"Suggest that since the Lewis and Clark Expedition encompassed more than the State of Montana that the historic site be named Tower Rock Historic Site".

4. "Relative to the map suggest the location of the parking lot be moved to parallel to the toe of the interstate egress road slope and moved to the South as far as possible to eliminate the need to replace the existing fence enclosing the garbage and propane areas." Marvin Holtz, Vice President, Reaching the Rockies Chapter, Lewis & Clark Heritage Trail Foundation

5. "The parking pad you described also varies from the schematic exhibited at the May 1 public meeting sponsored by the department. In particular, the parking signage area indicated in the 10/27/04 EA site plan is too close to the county's transfer station operation. As such, it invites conflict and congestion with dumpster traffic, something most everyone who has been involved with the project has been trying to minimize.

Placement in close proximity to the utility area also denies visitors, especially those who choose to remain in or near a parked vehicle, a view of the eastern perspective of the historic rock formation." Cheryl S. Hutchinson, Cascade, MT

The Final Environmental Assessment may be viewed, or obtained from the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region Four, Great Falls, MT. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, or the final EA, please direct requests and questions to: Mr. Mike Aderhold, Region Four Supervisor, 4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59405, (406) 454-5846.

Signed: Mike Aderhold

Mike Aderhold, Region 4 Supervisor

Date: 1/11/05